State Library of North Carolina

Access to State Government Information

WORK GROUP MEETING #1
DECEMBER 4-5, 2003
MEETING NOTES

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I.   Statement of Goals and Expectations

Jan Reagan welcomed all Work Group members to the meeting and introduced project staff. She then introduced the following goals and expectations, for the Access to State Government Information Initiative, the Solutions Work Group, and the first meeting of the Work Group.

Access to State Government Information Initiative Goal:
To ensure permanent public access to North Carolina State Government Information in all formats.

Solutions Work Group Expectations and Goal
Expectations: Work together to assess options and reach consensus on recommendations for North Carolina state governmentÊs approach to identifying, collecting, preserving, and providing permanent public access to state government in all formats.
Goal: (Phase II of project): Develop a plan of action, *Solutions for Success: Strategies for Managing Digital State Government Information*.

 Work Group Meeting Goals
   1. Introduce Work Group Concept
   2. Share results from Phase I research
   3. Discuss issues and challenges of managing digital information
   4. Gain a commitment to the ASGI Initiative and Work Group
   5. Determine the Work GroupÊs approach to meeting its goal

II.   Introduction of Meeting Attendees

Participants in the Work Group introduced themselves and identified themselves as belonging to one or more of four stakeholder groups involved in the Initiative:
1. Producers/Providers (e.g. agency staff who create and disseminate publications)
2. Facilitators (e.g. librarians who provide access to state government information)
3. Technology (e.g. webmasters and database administrators)
4. End Users (e.g. people who use state government information)

Many participants identified with multiple groups. The meeting roster provides a more detailed overview of participantsÊbackgrounds. During introductions, participants were asked to provide a brief (5 words or less) statement of how they viewed the situation relating to the long-term preservation and access of digital information. Some participants viewed the situation in negative terms (nihilistic, proceeding blindly, scary, overwhelming) while others viewed it as an exciting and challenging situation, but not one that is insurmountable. Several people mentioned that it is imperative to take action now, and convince others of the need to act. Other responses included the need for strong leadership, that policy and social issues will be more of a barrier that technology, and that access can be improved through standards.

III.   Project Overview and Report on Phase I Research Findings

Kristin Martin presented an overview of the Access to State Government Information Initiative and the research findings from Phase I. Copies of the presentation slides are in the resource book.

IV.   Brainstorming

Summary: Participants were asked to voice their thoughts on „the task at hand‰ the management of digital government information. Several different themes emerged, answering three questions. First, the management of digital government information must be addressed because access to information is the foundation of democracy and essential for the long-term survival of civilization. Digital information is fragile and can easily be lost. Second, multiple groups will need to take action to manage digital government information, but memory institutions may be best suited to handle the long-term preservation of such information. Third, to manage digital information, the state will need to take a multi-faceted approach that will require support and buy-in from all stakeholders, a source of renewable funding, expertise in technology, and standards and criteria for identifying and appraising information.

The Questions in More Detail
1. Why tackle this problem (the management of digital government information)?
- Access to government information is the foundation of democracy. Citizens expect and demand free information.
- We must ensure that everyone has resources to access information and is aware of its availability. The ease of information on the Web is an equalizer, but is not in and of itself sufficient for equal access.

- Government activities should be open and transparent to the citizens, and its actions and activities are documented through records and publications. Digital information is more easily lost, whether accidentally or intentionally, so it must be safeguarded.
- The presentation of the historical records provides the basis for scholarship. It enables evaluation, progress, and analysis. Without a historical record, there is no way to analyze trends.
- The average citizen needs to understand the past to plan for the future.
- People use government information daily. It has a social and cultural impact on individualsÊlives and all of society.
- Government information is essential to the long-term survival of civilization. For example, government information provides details on wastewater treatment and environmental hazards.
- The ability to successfully search for information is just as important as preserving it. „If you canÊt find it, you donÊt have it!‰ We currently have too much information that is not well organized.
- The time to act has come. There is more awareness of the issues within government, and a critical mass of people understanding the issues will facilitate action.

2. Who should be responsible for the management of digital government information?
- Multiple groups (producers, collectors, and all stakeholders involved) will need to take responsibility to successfully manage digital information.
- All of state government will need to be involved.
- Those who are responsible for managing state government information now should maintain this responsibility for digital government information.
- Memory institutions are best suited to handle long-term preservation.
  - Archives and libraries are not focused on their own agenda, so they have less bias and no axe to grind.
  - Archives and libraries serve state government.

3. What is needed to manage digital government information?
- Support and buy-in to educate and sell the program:
  - Identify and educate people to champion our cause:
    - public sector
    - private sector (lobbyists, associations like NCLA)
    - power stakeholders
  - Marshal public support.
  - Educate lawmakers about the importance of managing digital information in terms they understand. We want this to be something they can present with pride to their constituents.
  - Educate state government officials/decision makers.
  - Educate state employees and producers of state information.
  - Make the preservation imperative a visible issue to the public and the legislature.
  - Better communication with state agencies. We need to seek ways to better serve their needs, rather than demand compliance.

- o Prepare a business case, including costs and benefits. This may include quantifying intangible benefits.
- o Work to „level the playing field‰ within state government agencies to help ensure compliance. More collaboration within state government will help.
- o Solicit partners to advocate multiple formats. Sometimes digital formats may be preferable, other times paper will be better, and sometimes we will need both.
- Secure renewable source of funding.
- Human resources with skills and expertise in technology.
- Multi-faceted approach.
- Ensure the information is available to all people. For those that have trouble finding information, there must be a network of people available to facilitate access to digital government information.
- Standards.
- Process to provide permanent public access must begin at the informationʼs creation.
- Effective mix of education, incentives, and enforcement.
- Determine criteria for identifying, assessing, and appraising information.
  - o Determine what should be saved and what should be discarded. It is possible with improvements in technology that may be easier or less expensive to save everything than to appraise information. It will depend on access tools as well.
  - o Appraisal should occur at the point of creation.
  - o Develop criteria for what to keep in original format.
  - o Identify aspects of the information to preserve and find technology to do it (e.g. authenticity, integrity).
  - o Base criteria on risk management.

IV.   Challenges of Preservation and Access and Project Addressing the Challenges

After a brief recapitulation of yesterdayʼs meeting by Jan Reagan, Kristin Martin presented information on the challenges of preservation and access to digital information, and outlined some projects underway to address the challenges. Slides from the presentation are available in the Resource Book.

V.   Best Case Solutions for Providing Permanent Public Access

Summary: Participants were asked to brainstorm on best case solutions and scenarios for providing permanent public access to digital state government information. Individuals had differing ideas about what was a „best case‰ solution and it was hard for some people to consider solutions without immediately placing them within the context of the current state government situation. However, the members of the Work Group agreed that a robust program with secure funding would be necessary and would need to fill the following four requirements. First, statutory requirements will be necessary for a legal basis, and it should be easy and desirable for agencies to comply. Second, a centralized organization will be necessary for the creation of tools

and standards, and probably also for the long-term storage of digital information. Third, there would be a structure in place for ongoing training and education. Fourth, there will be criteria in place to appraise and select information.

Requirements in More Detail

Any project will require recurring appropriations and will need to be able to successfully negotiate the political environment and withstand changes in administration and priorities. The following four criteria will help ensure this:

1. Statutory Requirement
   a. Statutory requirements will provide the legal basis for whatever systems are put in place.
      - This will give statutory authority to adopt standards.
      - Standards will be set by rules, with one body setting the rules.
      - Standards created for describing digital objects (e.g. metatags and other metadata) will be flexible and broad enough to describe any type of object and show relationships between objects.
   b. Agencies will be eager to comply with any new statutory requirements.
      - Any organization putting forth a program to provide permanent public access will need to show to agencies that this a valuable service that will benefit the agencies (save labor, time, money, better able to serve constituents, etc.)
      - The program must provide a lot more carrot than stick because relying solely on enforcement will never be practical. (Note: there was a lot of discussion here about the difficulties of enforcement. More on that is in the Challenges section).
      - The solution will not require a lot of effort on the part of the agencies.
2. Centralized Organization
   a. There will be a centralized organization to develop and maintain tools, changing them as technology evolves.
      - The centralized organization can monitor agency efforts and provide back-up for smaller agencies.
      - There could be a two-tiered system where larger agencies with more resources have more responsibility for identifying material and creating metadata, while smaller agencies could rely on the centralized organization to assist with these tasks.
   b. There will most likely be a centralized repository under one organization to maintain digital information selected for preservation.
      - There was some discussion whether a distributed repository, where agencies would be responsible for their own archives, would be better, but there was concern such a method would be less stable, subject to funding changes, priority changes, and technology issues.
      - The centralized repository is a simple solution, gives clout to require formats and other requirements, pools resources, and makes the material available in one place.

- Any centralized repository would be mirrored at other places to ensure redundancy of data, should information in the one repository become damaged.
- There would be multiple access points available for finding information, such as Z39.50, MARC, and GILS searches, with multi-purpose and interoperable metadata

3. Structure in place for ongoing training and education.
   - A chief records officer or equivalent person would coordinate the efforts of each agency. Larger agencies might have more than one such person, and smaller agencies might share one person between them.
   - A permanent statutory task force would serve as an advisory body to any programs put in place. The task force would help agencies work together and serve as a source of experts that agencies could depend on to help make preservation and access decisions.
   - Staff at the centralized agency would be available to train and educate staff within the agencies. Every state employee would be educated on the lifecycle process of information creation.
   - There would be cooperation between the stakeholder groups: creators, information technology, and facilitators.

4. Criteria in place to appraise and select information for permanent preservation.
   - Not everything would be selected to be saved or have extensive metadata.
   - Criteria would determine different levels of access depending on the type of information.
   - Criteria would identify a „core collection‰ consisting of objects that are especially important to preserve. When possible, such objects would be maintained in a printed „legacy‰ collection. Core information that can only be maintained in digital format would also be part of the collection. This should be incorporated into statute.
   - Criteria would determine when the presentation and original format of information needs to be preserved, and when preserving the content, even if in a different format, is sufficient.

VI.   Realities of State Government and Possibilities for Solutions

Summary: Kristin Martin presented on the challenges within state government as well as some potential projects to address these challenges. The presentation, the slides of which are included in the Resource Book, was supplemented by additional challenges and projects discussed by the work group participants. The challenges included restricted and changing appropriations, decentralization and lack of overall technology guidance, lack of standards, lack of compliance, lack of good technological solutions, difficulty identifying information, and complexity of dynamic formats such as databases. Some projects are already in place which may serve as solutions to managing digital government information. These include FIND NC, a project designed to provide access to current state government information; Public Database Indexing Guidelines, records law which requires agencies to index their electronic records (NC GILS is designed to do this); guidelines put forth by the Division of Archives and Records to evaluate website content; and the ENCompass software suite, which allows for the storage and access of

Detailed Description of the Challenges:
1. State budget woes have adversely affected publishing and make it difficult to receive appropriations.
2. Decentralization of information publishing and dissemination in agencies makes it difficult both to identify what to save and to get a high rate of compliance and involvement in projects.
   - The decentralized nature of North Carolina state government contributes to this problem. There is a culture of independence and autonomy within state agencies.
3. There is a lack of overarching standards and policies relating to digital government information.
4. There is a lack of compliance for existing policies and systems (State Publications Clearinghouse, Public Database Indexing Guidelines, records retention schedules).
   - Enforcement will be difficult if not impossible. State Library and State Archives and Records lack enforcement power.
   - Different agencies will also have different definitions as to what enforcement means, so they might think they have complied with the law, whereas the governing body might not think so.
5. Politics and changes in political office create a volatile environment where priorities and funding are often rearranged.
6. Lack of involvement of statewide Information Technology Systems on any preservation plan as of yet.
   - Need involvement and cooperation but also want to maintain control and not cede project to ITS.
   - We are not sure how to use technologies currently within our system.
7. Technology solutions are still in their infancy.
   - Technology vendors could (and have) held programs hostage.
8. It is difficult to identify digital information that needs to be saved.
   - Often multiple agencies offer similar information. Whose is best? Does it matter?
   - URLs are constantly changing.
9. Databases add a layer of complexity to all solutions.
   - Need to figure out what to preserve · data, software, presentation?
   - The sheer size and complexity of databases make them difficult to deal with.
   - The information contained within databases is some of the most important information produced by the state.
   - Technology solutions, while in their infancy for other formats, have not yet even been born for databases.
   - Agencies will want to maintain control of databases that are constantly changing; yet the information will need to be preserved and accessible at the same time.

Detailed Description of the Potential Solutions
1. FIND NC and NC GILS.
   - This project is focused on access and description.

- Websites are tagged for access, and metadata from different sources are stored together and searchable through the interface.
- Blue Angel Technologies provides the suite of software for running the site.
- NC GILS has been developed as a metadata standard for North Carolina. It is already part of the Statewide Technical Architecture, and is scalable and interoperable. It has been designed to describe almost any resource. It is also very complex and needs tools to make it easier.

2. Public Database Indexing Guidelines.
   - Guidelines are part of Public Records Law.
   - They apply to all types of electronic records, not only to the more traditional definition of „database.‰
   - NC GILS has been designed in part to fulfill the guidelines.
   - The guidelines have not been heavily followed.

3. Archives and Records guidelines for the website content evaluation.
   - Recently approved tool for assessing the content and value of agency websites.
   - It is the agencyÊs responsibility to assess the website, take the appropriate snapshot, and then store it themselves or send to archives for storing.

4. ENCompass.
   - Software package purchased by the State Library and State Archives that can store and provide access to digital information.
   - Archives is currently using for access to digitized material in the State Archives.
   - There are problems getting data into the system.

5. Archives/ITS digital repository.
   - State Archives is currently investigating having ITS develop a digital repository for themselves and for agencies.
   - ITS is considering itself to be a vendor and expects the service to be fee-based.
   - Archives/Records is currently working on a white paper describing current processes/best case solutions.
   - Gary Alexander is the contact person at ITS.

6. Capturing Electronic Publications (Illinois State Library).
   - Illinois has a grant to bring software and technical expertise to install software that crawls and captures websites.
   - North Carolina would like to be one the test states to receive the software.
   - We will need a Linux workstation.

7. Proposed National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program Partnership.
   - University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is the lead institution to develop a selection tool to capture digital material from the web.
   - The grant will also investigate different digital repository systems.
   - North Carolina is on as test state for capturing digital state government information.
   - Awards will be announced in February 2004.

VII. How to Meet Work Group Goal

The Work Group discussed the best method for meeting the goals of the Work Group and the project. We decided to break up into committees to tackle major areas of the quest for permanent public access. Committees will meet individually during the next few months, and then report their findings to the full Work Group. The next full Work Group meeting is anticipated in April. Descriptions of each of the four committees and their charge are located in a separate document.